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SUBJECT: RUSSIA CRITICIZES GEORGIA IN UNSC CONSULTATIONS ON
ABKHAZIA

REF: SECSTATE 08687

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In closed UNSC consultations on January 29, UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Jean Arnault reported to Council members that there had been few developments since the release of the SYG's latest quarterly report. Arnault stressed that there had been no significant incidents in Abkhazia during the reporting period. He said U/SYG Guehenno will convene a meeting of the Friends in Geneva February 18-19 aimed at restarting dialogue between the sides and promoting implementation of the confidence building measures (CBMs) discussed in Bonn last year. Arnault also stated that UNOMIG is reviewing deployment of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to enhance observation capacity and hopes to present a proposal to the Council by April.

¶2. (SBU) Summary Continued: Russian Permrep Churkin said despite recent calm the situation in Abkhazia is unstable and criticized Georgia's "military buildup" there. Churkin acknowledged that the Saakashvili administration had made some post-election positive soundings regarding resolution of the conflict, but these need to be followed by tangible steps. The past actions of Georgia's leadership, he said, have only led to stalemate. Most Council members expressed support for a UN-led assessment of the Abkhazia peace process and for considering deploying UAVs, though some Council members said use of UAVs requires financial scrutiny. End Summary.

Arnault: Past Three Months Without Incident In Abkhazia

¶3. (SBU) On January 29, SRSG Arnault briefed Council members in closed consultations on the SYG's latest report on UNOMIG.

He said there were few developments following the SYG's report other than a minor incident involving Georgian patrol boats off the coast of Abkhazia. He reported no change in his positive assessment as there had not been significant incidents in Abkhazia during the past three months. Arnault noted that Georgia is putting a new cabinet in place and Temur Yakobashvili is being confirmed to replace David Bakradze as Minister of Re-integration, but said the name change from Ministry of State Conflicts to Ministry of Re-integration had been criticized by the Abkhaz. Arnault said U/SYG Guehenno will convene a meeting of the Friends in Geneva February 18-19 aimed at restarting dialogue between the sides and promoting implementation of the CBMs discussed in Bonn last year. He said UNOMIG is currently reviewing deployment of UAVs and hoped the Council will be able to discuss this in April. Regarding the planned UN assessment of the peace process, Arnault said he had seen slow implementation of CBMs and needed to take stock of the peace

process to date including CBMs, IDP return, political dialogue and the overall progress of the past decade. Arnault planned for the assessment to be completed by late Spring after Georgian parliamentary elections.

Russia: Situation Unstable Because Of Georgia

¶4. (SBU) Making his national statement first, Russian Ambassador Churkin said the apparent calm in the zone of conflict belied an unstable situation and criticized the Georgian presence in the Upper Kodori Valley, estimating it to be as many as 1,400 persons. He criticized what he characterized as a Georgian "military buildup" that allowed Georgian personnel to sometimes "bypass" CIS peacekeepers. Churkin further criticized the presence of the Georgian Youth Patriotic Camp at Inghuri as a provocation of the Abkhaz and rebuked "daily misinformation" by Georgian media and officials focused against the Abkhaz side and CIS peacekeepers. Churkin said Russia shares the SYG's concern about the erosion of trust between the sides. It was time to push forward completing the documents on non-resumption of hostilities and return of IDPs. He also asserted there was no merit to Georgian concerns that signing such an agreement would put them on a symbolic equal footing with the Abkhaz. Churkin acknowledged that the Saakashvili administration had made some post-election positive soundings regarding resolution of the conflict, but these needed to be followed by tangible steps. He charged that past actions of Georgia's leadership had only led to stalemate. Churkin concluded that Russia will continue to take steps aimed at settlement of the conflict by peaceful means.

Statements By Other Council Members

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¶5. (SBU) French Permrep Ripert praised the decline in incidents, especially noteworthy as it had occurred during a political crisis in Georgia and elections that might have been expected to increase tensions. France stressed the necessity of focusing on three parameters: 1) respect for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity; 2) political work and the irreplaceability of the Friends; and 3) making the return of IDPs to Abkhazia a priority. France expressed support for the deployment of UAVs by UNOMIG. Belgian Permrep Verbeke expressed disappointment with the standstill on the political process and said that a bottom-up approach remained the best way forward. Belgium supported improving the monitoring capabilities of UNOMIG in the Kodori Valley and beyond, but using UAVs needed the trust of both sides. He also called for a cost-analysis.

¶6. (SBU) UK Permrep Sawers stated that the current calm is laudable, but expressed disappointment with the lack of trust in the peace process. The UK expressed support for Belgium's suggestion that the financial impact of the UAV proposal be reviewed. Italian Deputy Permrep Mantovani expressed support for normalization in Georgian-Russian relations and also agreed that UAVs should receive financial scrutiny. Croatia favored deployment of UAVs as soon as possible and completion of the assessment of the peace process as a way of giving that process new momentum.

¶7. (SBU) Per reftel, USUN Political Minister-Counselor stressed the importance of the efforts of Arnault to reach a peaceful settlement in Abkhazia, welcomed cooperation between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides to allow the Joint Fact Finding Team's investigation into the September 20 incident, and expressing regret for the loss of life involved on September 20. He voiced USG strong support for enhancement of UNOMIG's observation capacity and for promptly deploying UAVs in the region if the SRSG's final assessment determines they are the most effective means to enhance this capacity.

Russia's Additional Comments On UAVs And Questions On Assessment Of Peace Process

18. (SBU) Russian Permrep Churkin requested the floor again near the end of the meeting, saying that he agreed with the comments that the cost of UAV deployment should be reviewed, but said even more important is not damaging trust between the sides. Regarding the UN assessment of the peace process, Churkin asked Arnault about the UN's approach, the role of the Friends and the outcome. Arnault responded that UAVs should cost UNOMIG approximately three million dollars per year, whereas utility radar would involve "huge costs and large increases in personnel. UAVs therefore seemed to be "a fairly cost-effective way of significantly increasing UNOMIG's observational capacity." Regarding the assessment of the peace process, Arnault said he believed the time had come for stocktaking as there was more and more vocal opposition to an approach based on CBMs. This would involve not just political dialogue but also return of IDPs, CBMs, the cease-fire and other issues. Arnault said he intended to involve UNHCR and other UN organizations as well as non-UN organizations.

Comment

19. (SBU) Comment: If Department believes that UAVs would fill a critical need in enhancing UNOMIG's operational effectiveness then we may want to consult with the UK and others who questioned their cost. End Comment.
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